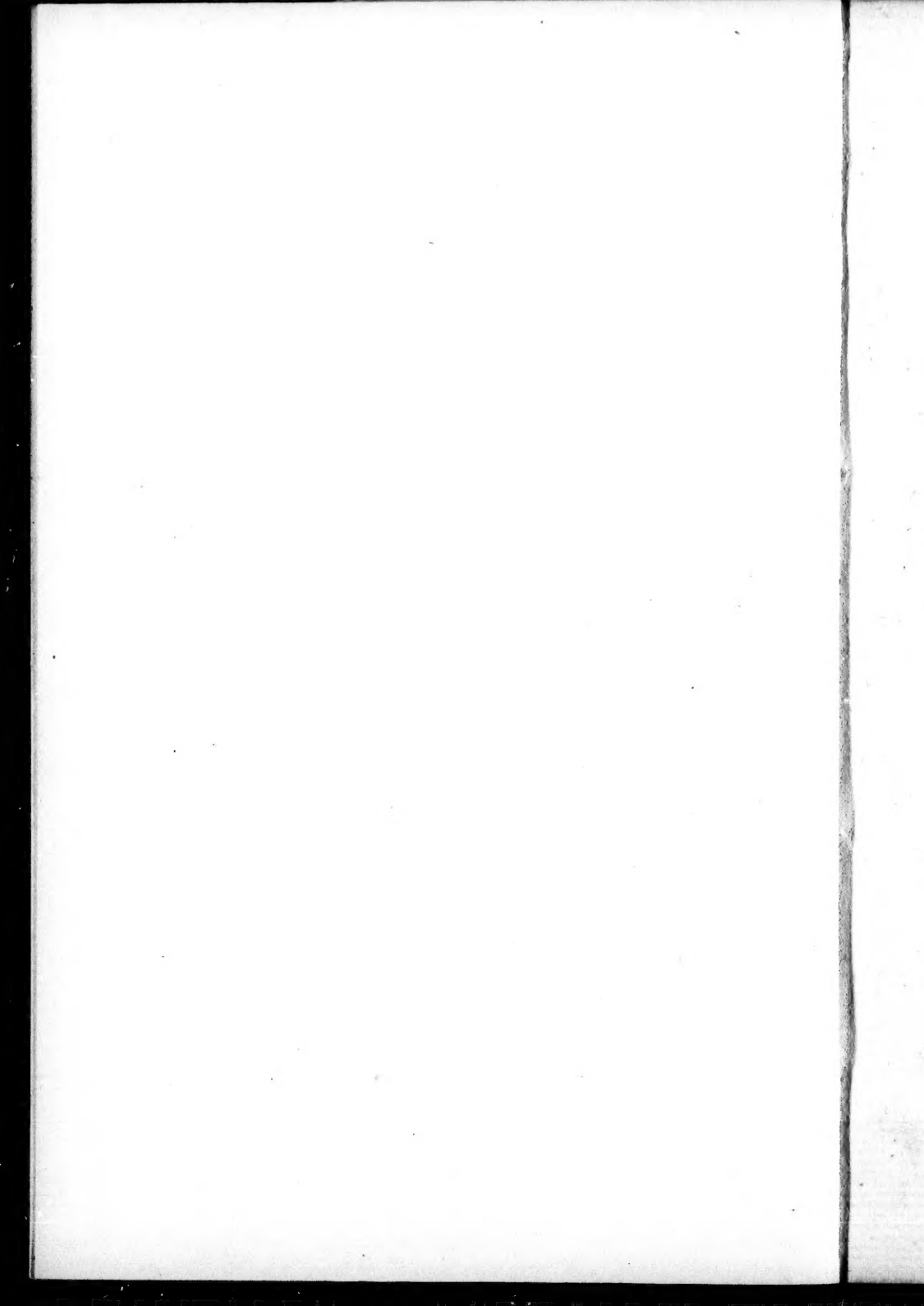




A
SERMON,

PREACHED

IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHAPEL AT QUEBEC;

ON

THURSDAY, THE 10th JANUARY 1799,

BEING

THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A

GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

By The REV^D. ALEX^R. SPARK.

TO WHICH IS ADDED A FORM OF THANKSGIVING USED
ON THE OCCASION.

QUEBEC:

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1799.

TO THE READER

WHEN some, who heard the following discourse delivered, first did me the honour to express a desire that it might be published, I was induced to decline complying with the request, because I was sensible that, owing to various avocations, I had not given that time and application to the composing of it, which I should wish to employ in preparing a discourse to meet the public eye, and because I was apprehensive the sale of the copies would not be sufficient to defray the expence of printing.

But these considerations have been over-ruled by new applications, and farther reasons for publishing it suggested, which, whether well founded or not, I am not inclined to dispute. It is now, therefore, sent to the Press, in the same state in which it was delivered. The candid read-

er will know how to estimate these circumstances, and, it is hoped, will consider them as some apology for its defects.

The form of Thanksgiving subjoined is that part of the morning Prayer, which had respect to the recent Victory, by the blessing of God, obtained over the French fleet, in the Mediterranean, which was the object of the solemnity.

A. S.

Quebec, 4th February, 1799.

SERMON.

GENESIS 20. 11.

"Abraham said, because I thought, surely the fear of GOD is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake."

THE Patriarch Abram having been called of God to be the father of the faithful, left his native country, which was Ur of the Chaldees, and lived as a stranger in the land of Canaan. After taking up his abode for some time at Sichem, again moving from thence to Bethel, and afterwards to Mamre; after having been forced by famine to go down into Egypt,—having returned again to Mamre, and having there witnessed the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah;—after these, and many other varieties of fortune and situation, this pious Patriarch determined to travel into Gerar, a small principality of the Philistines, which was at a greater

greater distance from the ruins of Sodom. Upon his entrance into that country, he thought expedient to conceal part of the truth respecting Sarah, who accompanied him. He told the people of Gerar that she was his sister*, but purposely avoided mentioning that she was his wife. When, therefore, Abimeleck, the King of the country, intended to marry her, and discovered that she was Abram's wife, he was much dissatisfied with the Patriarch, for having concealed this fact from him, and thereby led him into so great an error. Abram's apology for this conduct is expressed in the words of our text. "*Because, I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.*" Taking the inhabitants of Gerar to be a people, who had no sense of religion, or reverence of the Supreme Being, he reasoned after this manner, that neither justice nor honour was to be expected among them. "*They will slay me,*" saith he,

* It was customary among the Hebrews to give the appellation of *Sister*, or *Brother*, to a near relation, though not born of the same parents, as it was also to call a descendant, though several degrees removed, a *Son* or *Daughter*. Sarah was Grand-daughter of Terah, the Father of Abram.

he, "*for my wife's sake.*" Having no principles of religion, as if he had said, to bind the conscience, or to be a foundation for moral virtue, there is nothing to restrain them from any act of cruelty, or injustice, to which their passions may stimulate them, and which it is in their power to commit. He adopted it as a maxim, that where there is no *fear of God*, or reverence of the Supreme Being, in the rulers of a nation, or in the community at large, we have reason to expect no steady regard to the principles of moral virtue, in the conduct of that people.

It is the intention of this discourse to inquire into the grounds and certainty of this maxim of the Patriarch.

Considering the character of Abram for wisdom and piety, we may be well assured, that a maxim, which he made the rule of his conduct, is not without some good foundation, both in reason and experience.

1. To convince you of its reasonableness, you need only reflect to what various propensities

sities and violent passions mankind are naturally liable, and how destructive these are, if not confined within due bounds, by some sentiments of religion.

Even in the smallest communities, and most imperfect state of society, where there is least scope for these evils, you may observe how the love of ease in some, the lust of pleasure, jealousy, or the study of revenge in others, is apt to endanger the peace and security of the whole. In larger communities, where the objects of desire are multiplied, and men's pursuits, in consequence, more varied, their passions are stimulated by stronger incentives, and new propensities besides are awaked. Wealth, luxury, power and distinction awake the passions of avarice, envy, pride and ambition. Such also is the power, and such the violence of those passions, that if left to their natural operation, they would unavoidably render human life a scene of disorder and misery.

WHAT is it then which restrains those passions and propensities of our nature, within due bounds, and thereby prevents those convulsions of Society, and miseries of mankind,
which

which would otherwise ensue? Is this solely to be attributed to the force of human Laws? It will, indeed, be readily confessed that human laws, well adapted and wisely administered, have an excellent and powerful effect towards this end; but it must be recollected that there is no chance of finding such laws or administration, in a nation where there is no "*fear of God.*" The framing and enforcing of good laws presuppose a degree of sound wisdom and integrity, both in the legislative and executive authorities, which is not to be looked for in a combination of reprobates. The foundations of an active and permanent principle of virtue must be laid deeper than the petty views, shifting pursuits, and fleeting hopes of the present life. In short, its only true and certain foundation is "*the fear of the Lord;*" a sacred belief and reverence of the Supreme Being. Without this, even the wisest administration of the best laws, (could that be deemed possible,) would be found inadequate to restrain the violent and interfering passions and propensities of mankind, combined in society.

THE man who laughs at Futurity, and considers all religion as a jest or imposture, can have no principle within him, sufficient to be a proper bond of faith or duty. He will feel little other check to the gratification of his lust or rapacity, than that, which he may meet from his fellow-men. Where this want of principle, therefore, is combined with power, the consequences must be awfully alarming.

THE savage beasts of the forest, to which the faculty of reason is denied, are so guided by the instincts of their nature, that some calculation may, at all times, be made, of the danger to be apprehended from them. Brute creatures of the same species, in similar circumstances, will generally act in a similar manner. But man, who ought to be guided by a nobler principle than that of instinct, when he disclaims the affection of piety, and renounces the light of divine truth, which ought to illuminate his reason, and give a proper direction to all the energies of his mind, the enormities, of which he may then be guilty, are utterly inconceiveable and incalculable. No beast of the
forest

forest is to be compared to him, in cruelty or mischief. As his faculties are superior to those of the brute creation, so are they more signally and deplorably destructive, when perverted and misapplied.

THE only true, and most effectual restraint to these destructive passions in human nature, is a sense of God and religion—a consciousness of future retribution—a firm belief in divine providence—and such a sense of the vanity of earthly things, as the expectations of futurity are adapted to inspire. Without these principles recognised and maintained, we can expect no proper order, or security—no public faith, on which we may rely, in any association of men—no steady regard to virtue, fidelity, or justice.

2. THIS fact, which appears obviously to result from the nature of man, and from the tendency and operation of his passions, in a state of Society, will also be found conformable to general experience. I doubt not but it will appear, in the history of the world, since
mankind

mankind were first united in Society, that, in as far as any nation hath ever been negligent of religious duties, or destitute of a regard to the worship and fear of the Supreme Being, in so far have they been found corrupted in their morals—unsettled and insecure among themselves—bad neighbours—injurious companions, or treacherous allies.

Piety, morality, and public faith must go hand in hand. Religion corrects the irregular propensities of the heart—gives strength and stability to virtuous purposes, and cherishes those dispositions, and that temper of mind, which are most friendly to peace, order, and good government. Hence it is that we find Princes and Legislators, in all *former* ages, were at pains to maintain a sense of religion, in the minds of their subjects. Experience must, very early, have taught them to perceive the indispensable necessity of this principle, in order to promote a proper regard to social duty. For, although a few men of superior capacities, or better information, might perhaps perceive a natural obligation strong enough to engage

engage them to practise the duties of justice towards their neighbours, and of obedience to the laws of the community, yet this is not a motive adapted to the bulk of mankind. If *they* perceive not, nor believe the authority of a Supreme Being, you can scarcely expect a sense of duty from any other source, so to affect their minds, as to restrain them from evil, when it may be committed with impunity, or to engage them in the practice of that which is good.

WHETHER, therefore, we reason from the nature of things, or whether from the experience of mankind, we may justly conclude, according to the maxim of the patriarch, that *where there is no fear of God, there is no public faith, or steady principle of virtue.*

It is true that the annals of antiquity do not furnish an instance of any nation, that formally renounced the worship and belief of a Supreme Being, which we might here offer as an example. We read of none, in former ages, which
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did not acknowledge the existence of God*, and pay him some kind of homage. But an example, which former ages never saw, and which they might most probably have been apt to deem impossible, hath been reserved for the eventful period, in which we ourselves live †. We have, indeed, heard of various forms of worship and systems of religion, from the earliest times prevailing, in different parts of the world, (all which, however, operated as some kind

* *Ipſiſque in hominibus, nulla gens eſt neque tam immanſueta, neque tam fera, quæ non, etiam ſi ignoret qualem habere Deum deceat, tamen habendum ſciat.*

Cicero de Legibus N. 24.

† In the Council of Paris, on the 24th of November 1793, a reſolve was paſſed to the following effect: “ Conſidering that
“ the people of Paris have declared that they acknowledge no
“ other worſhip than that of reaſon and truth, the Council re-
“ ſolves, that all the Temples of different religious worſhip,
“ which are known to be in Paris, ſhall be inſtantly ſhut.”

On the 25th of Auguſt ſame year, a deputation of inſtruction appeared at the bar of the National Convention, when, one of the Children who accompanied the deputation, having been inſtructed to that purpoſe, requested that, *inſtead of preaching to them in the name of the ſelf ſtiled God, they might be inſtructed in the principles of equality, the rights of man, and the conſtitution.* This requeſt was heard with applauſe.

kind of bond upon the conscience, and fostered a belief of future retribution for present conduct) but, what no other age ever witnessed, we have, in our own days, beheld a great nation—an immense people, as with their collective voice, declaring, and boasting in it, that they acknowledged no Deity, and expected no hereafter. This is a monument of impiety, which will doubtless be regarded with astonishment and horror, to the latest posterity. Who can, without shuddering, relate that this infatuated nation hath, with boundless applause, beheld her dignified clergy trampling on what was regarded as the sacred emblem of their religious faith,*—her Magistrates publicly teaching the people that *death is an eternal sleep*.

* Gobet, Archbishop of Paris, is said to have trampled upon the Cross in the Church of Notre Dame.

On the 7th November 1793, he went to the National Convention, attended by his Vicar, where he openly abjured his episcopal functions, and *the religion of Christ*, while loud cries of *Vive la Republique*, resounded throughout the Hall. Many other Bishops attended, who imitated the apostasy of the Archbishop, and were received with no less applause, and with the civic kiss, on the part of the president. A colossal monument was proposed to be erected to manifest the suppression of all religious worship.

Vid. Europ. Mag.

sleep, †—some of her representatives, in the National Council, openly professing themselves *Atheists*, §—and others declaring themselves the *personal enemies* of the Saviour of mankind? ‡ To such a monstrous height of depravity have the minds of these men attained, while the world bears witness that the depravity of their manners hath not been less notorious.

HERE then is a new proof, and pregnant example of the maxim in our text. Here all men may behold the *natural*, and we may venture to say, the *necessary* effects of Atheism and irreligion. There is scarcely any species of crime or enormity, which we have not beheld commonly practised among that people, since they renounced their God, and denied their Saviour.

WHAT

† A new burying-ground was laid out, by the municipality of Paris, in which was erected a statue representing sleep, with this inscription, “ *Death is an eternal sleep.*”

§ The Deputy Dupont, in a formal Speech, in the Convention, declared himself an Atheist.

‡ Anacharsis Cloots is said to have made this declaration. Vid. Life of Cloots by Phillips.

WHAT latent and powerful cause, it will naturally be asked, could have contributed to produce this extraordinary change, and unexampled depravity, in the sentiments of this people, respecting religion? Surprising as the fact must unquestionably appear, it cannot have arrived without a cause, and it is presumed this cause may also partly be discovered. We can hardly entertain a doubt but that it has, in a great measure, been owing to the sceptical and deistical doctrines, which, by a prostitution of the most eminent talents, have been so liberally disseminated, within the present century. Whether with a view of exposing superstition—merely from motives of vanity, or others perhaps less excusable than those, some men, whose characters rank high in the republic of letters, were employed for a series of years, in effacing from the minds of men that reverence due to things sacred, and in scattering the seeds of infidelity †. Those seeds failed not to take root; and being watered and cherished

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† Voltaire, Bayle, Rousseau, Mandeville, &c.

ished by succeeding Deists or infidels, perhaps still more culpable than the first, they have now arrived at full maturity. Were those arch-deceivers still alive, who were at such pains to gild over the poison of their infidelity, with the attractions of wit and ornaments of eloquence, they might now behold the fruit of their labours. They might see the germe of impiety, planted by their hands, arrived at its full growth and perfection.

IF they can yet look through the veil, which divides their state from ours, while they behold twenty millions of people misled by their means, and so great a part of the world convulsed, let conscious shame appal their spirits. Notwithstanding God may, perhaps, through his great mercy, on their own timely repentance, have pardoned their guilt, yet let them drop a tear of sorrow and commiseration, over the miseries, which they have occasioned to mankind; for, in charity, we may believe that, if they had been aware of such consequences following their doctrines, they would themselves have revolted at the idea of disseminating them.

THE

THE fact is, that what was only deism at first, hath, in its progress, degenerated into absolute atheism †, or a contempt of all religion both natural and revealed. Those who began by only questioning the authority of Divine revelation, while they professed the highest reverence for the Supreme Being, have advanced, step by step, in the road of error and mazes of scepticism, until they have come, at last, openly to deny the God that made them ! It is with grief and astonishment that we hear some of them publicly avowing, in the face of the world, *that they consider religion as injurious to mankind,*

† It appears so unnatural and absurd that any man should ever divest himself of all sense of a Supreme Being, or imagine the universe could either be formed or governed without an intelligent cause, that many have been led to question the existence of this degree of impiety. However, when we appeal to history and experience, we are obliged to acknowledge the reality of a fact, which, without such undeniable proofs, we should be apt to deem impossible. Extraordinary as it may appear, atheism has even had its martyrs !

But, if the man who rejects the clearest evidence of reason, or who cannot perceive or apply it, be properly termed a madman, we may be authorized in regarding atheism as a species of madness. It is only *the fool that hath said in his heart these is no God.*

mankind, and that they look upon the Doctrines of the creation of the world out of nothing, of the immortality of the soul, and of the resurrection of the body, as monstrous absurdities, which have degraded man, by smothering his intellectual powers, and fettering his reason†.

WE here mention these things, merely to give you some idea what the avowed sentiments of this people are, respecting religious subjects. Barely to mention them, we trust, will to you be equal to a confutation of them, and cannot fail to excite your indignation and aversion. They are extracted from one of the most celebrated writers on what is called their new philosophy, and one who has been distinguished by a very great share of their national confidence‡.

You will observe, it is also in conformity with these sentiments, that they have ceased to compute their time according to the years of
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† Préjugés détruits.

‡ Lequino.

the Christian æra, or by the days of the week; and that they have totally abandoned the regard formerly paid to the Sabbath day, in order that they might leave no vestige of that religion, which it appears the obvious intention of their Legislature to abolish.

To improve and apply this subject, recollect the principal and leading facts, to which we have now called your attention.

1. WE have seen, according to the maxim of Abram, a wise and virtuous patriarch, that where we find no *fear of God*, or regard to religion, in the rulers of a nation, or in the society at large, *there* we are to expect no true morality, or steady principles of virtue; and it has been observed that this maxim is also confirmed by reason and experience.

WE have farther seen that, in the nation with which we are now at war, or at least in the faction by which it is at present governed, there certainly *is no fear of God*. They themselves have formally and openly renounced that
fear,

fear. They have not concealed this part of their character. They rather glory in it. According to the words of the Prophet, "The shew
 " of the countenance doth witness against them
 " and they declare their sin as Sodom * ." What then have we to expect of this people, while these sentiments prevail among them? We have still less reason to expect any regard to the principles of justice or virtue among them, under their present system of impiety, than Abram had among the inhabitants of Gerar. Abram had been partly mistaken or misinformed with regard to the character of that people; for, as appears from the conduct of Abimelech himself, they were not altogether without the *fear of God* among them.

Charity, even towards an enemy, would make us rejoice, could we expect to find the accounts, which we have heard of the *impiety* of the French nation, to be founded in a similar mistake. But the fact is too well known to give ground for such a hope. It is put beyond
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* Isaiah 3. 9.

a doubt, both by their own conduct and confession.

As Christians—as votaries of that holy faith, which they have renounced, it is our duty to wish well to our enemies. What then is the best wish we can entertain for this people? Is it that they may succeed in their enterprise, so as to confirm them in their impiety, and to corrupt all the nations of the earth, with their pernicious doctrines? Surely not. Our best and most benevolent wish towards them is, that they may be disappointed—that all their counsels may be confounded and turned backward, until they feel their own weakness, and confess that “*there is a God who ruleth in the earth.*”

Neither can we entertain a doubt but that this will be the case. Though God may, for a time, bear with a people, who renounce his law,—though he may grant them some partial success, yet we have reason to think, this can only be to make their fall the more signal. We know not on what principle to imagine it possible that they can escape punishment, even in this life.

IT

It is confessed, indeed, that, *taken individually*, men are not always punished in this life, according to their crimes, nor rewarded according to their virtues; and this is justly regarded as a very strong evidence that there must be a future life. But in regard to *National crimes*, the case is different. As men will not appear in a *National capacity*, to suffer punishment for these crimes, in a *future state*, it seems necessary to conclude that they must be expiated in the *present life*; and perhaps experience will shew that this has been the general course of Providence. The history of the world, it is presumed, cannot furnish an instance of any Nation, that was ever flagrantly wicked, cruel, impious, or unjust, without having, in the end, exhibited an example of the avenging power of Providence.

2. As it is our wisdom to learn by the errors and misfortunes of other men, from the sad example before us, let us learn to perceive the danger and mischief to be apprehended from profane and licentious writings; and let us judge the man who, by these means, labours
to

to corrupt the minds of the people, and to banish the *fear of God* from among them, a more dangerous enemy to his country, than he who takes up arms against it; or rather, let us judge him not only the enemy of his country, but of mankind.

Before the doctrines of scepticism had yet received a full trial in practice, if we may so speak, there might have been some colour of excuse for indulging them. But now no man can be at a loss to perceive the end to which they tend, and the mischiefs which they produce. It is, therefore, to be hoped that this one beneficial effect may result from the direful experiment, that as soon as the present ferment shall have subsided, these doctrines will fall into disrepute, and be as much detested by all men, as they were formerly admired by the wits of the age.

Finally: Let us bless God that we have hitherto been preserved from that *gross darkness*, which under the name of *light*, hath overspread so great a part of the world; and which, like

Satan

Satan in the form of an *Angel* of Heaven, hath insinuated itself into so many nations: And let us presume to hope, that, under the care and guidance of Divine Providence, we may still be protected from its baneful influence. As we now have the satisfaction of seeing the arms of our Country repel the attacks, and frustrate the ambitious projects of that apostate power, which hath erected the standard of impiety and Atheism, as a rallying point for all the nations of the earth, so may we expect soon to find that power humbled, and peace, and order again restored to the distracted nations.

That this happy period may soon arrive, may God of his mercy and goodness grant, and to his name be praise, through Christ our Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Form of Thanksgiving

O THOU, who rulest in the armies of Heaven, and in the Kingdoms of men; who stillest the waves of the sea and the tumults of the people, and whose tender mercies will never finally forsake those who put their confidence in thee, and duly respect thy righteous law;—with grateful hearts, we offer up unto thee our sincerest acknowledgments for the gracious support and countenance of thy providence, so liberally shewn to the arms of our Country; in the present important contest in which we are engaged. Thou hast triumphed gloriously, O Lord: Thou hast confounded the devices of the enemy, who cease not to blaspheme thy sacred Name; and thou hast maintained the cause of thy humble worshippers. Thou hast checked the torrent of iniquity, which, like an overflowing flood, threatened destruction to all the Kingdoms of the earth, and thou art become the hope and confidence of those who still continue attached to thy fear.

Accept, therefore, O most merciful Father,—
accept

accept we beseech thee, the sincerest gratitude of our hearts, for the late seasonable interposition of thy kind and watchful Providence in our behalf, which we have reason to judge of such importance, not only to our national prosperity and happiness, but also to the general cause of piety and humanity; and grant that we may ever bear upon our minds such a sense of thy goodness, as to incline us more and more to the obedience of thy law.

Continue, we beseech thee, to go out with our fleets and armies, and so guide their operations, by thy sovereign power and wisdom, that they may prove the happy instruments in thy hand, of restoring peace and order to the distracted nations.

O Thou, who bringest good of evil, and makest even the wrath of man to serve thee, graciously vouchsafe unto mankind the sanctified use and improvement of the present dispensation of events, and when thy judgments are abroad in the earth, let the inhabitants thereof learn righteousness.

Turn

Turn the hearts of those, who are deluded and deceived, and graciously spare, we beseech thee, the farther effusion of human blood. Having too long beheld the fatal effects of infidelity, may the people, at last, as one man, renounce those doctrines of sin, by which they are misled, and turn unto thee, the Lord, with purpose of heart.

F I N I S.